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# The evolution of an intellectual community through the words of its founders: recollections of Australia's economic history field

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## **Abstract**

Analysing the dynamic evolution of a scholarly field requires an understanding of the social interactions within its community as well as the impact of the written word. Influence might diffuse through mentoring, graduate supervision, seminar discussion, and management roles. To date, our knowledge of the growth of economic history in Australia after 1945 draws heavily upon the impact of a number of key publications. We interview a broad selection of academics who worked in the field of Australian economic history, approximately 1950-90, to provide a fuller understanding of the evolution of this interdisciplinary field. Our results confirm, complement and, in some cases, challenge conventional views.

## **Disciplines**

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# **The evolution of an intellectual community through the words of its founders: Recollections of Australia's economic history field**

*Claire Wright and Simon Ville*

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## *Abstract*

Analysing the dynamic evolution of a scholarly field requires an understanding of the social interactions within its community as well as the impact of the written word. Influence might diffuse through mentoring, graduate supervision, seminar discussion, and management roles. To date, our knowledge of the growth of economic history in Australia after 1945 draws heavily upon the impact of a number of key publications. We interview a broad selection of academics who worked in the field of Australian economic history, approximately 1950-90, to provide a fuller understanding of the evolution of this interdisciplinary field. Our results confirm, complement and, in some cases, challenge conventional views.

## *Keywords and JEL classification codes*

Intellectual community; economic history; Australian economic history; economic methodology; oral history

N01; A12; A14; B30

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The immediate post-World War II decades were a formative period for economic history in Australia, in a process that was shaped by a series of institutional, social and intellectual influences. Our understanding of this process is largely based upon a knowledge of the key published works of the period. In this paper, we utilise the findings of a series of oral history interviews conducted with members of the economic history community from the 1950s to 1980s, to enrich and extend what we know about the forces that shaped the development of this interdisciplinary field over time. In particular, these interviews provide a more contextual appreciation of the role of key individuals and ideas, the influence of overseas practices, and the impact of the spatial location and range of perspectives of the principal communities within Australia.

Oral history is a widely used methodology that has been applied previously to reflect on economic history in the US and the UK, as well as the study of intellectual communities more broadly. Interviews richly recreate the variety of views and opinions in a community, shift the limelight away from social and intellectual leaders, and allow for the exploration of aspects of the field's history that are not recorded or published. Inevitably though, divergent accounts, misremembrances, and various strategies of containment may affect the reliability of these perspectives.

The paper is structured as follows. The following section briefly summarises the value of oral history as a methodology that complements other, mostly written, sources. Its specific relevance to the study of intellectual communities is considered. A statement of the conventional narrative of the rise of Australian economic history is offered. We then describe the conduct of the interviews as the foundation for a longer section analysing their impact on the historical narrative of Australian economic history. Some concluding observations complete the paper.

## 2. THE STRENGTHS AND PITFALLS OF ORAL HISTORY AS A COMPLEMENTARY METHODOLOGY

Oral history is the 'interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction'.<sup>1</sup> It provides access to undocumented experiences from people who have participated in, or observed, past events.<sup>2</sup> Oral history often elicits additional information that is missing from the other, written sources that underlie much historical discourse. This serves to fill gaps in historical knowledge, provide an opportunity to reaffirm the validity of other sources or, in some cases, challenge them. By interviewing a range of individuals, oral history helps to

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<sup>1</sup> Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*; Thomson, *Fifty years on*.

recreate the 'original multiplicity of standpoints' that are represented in an historical moment.<sup>3</sup> By compiling individual recollections, history becomes more democratic, more contested, challenging the accepted judgements derived from those holding power or leadership at the centre of the original action. Oral history should not be treated as a substitute for existing written sources, but rather as complementing documentary sources to provide a richer and more nuanced expression of past events.<sup>4</sup>

Uniquely, oral historians are able to interact with their subjects. The process of reconstructing the past becomes collaborative, with historians able to be specific and selective about whom to interview and what to ask. In doing so, oral history becomes dynamic; it opens up new lines of enquiry and is no longer confined to those issues that are preserved in written accounts through contemporary publicity or investigation by authorities. The process of writing history becomes more creative, flexible and co-operative.<sup>5</sup>

These characteristics also make oral sources intrinsically subjective. 'Strategies of containment' occur where interviewees may repress; misremember or distort memories for personal, political or social reasons. They tend to disproportionately remember events from early adulthood, or those that seem in retrospect to have had an impact on their own life.<sup>6</sup> Further, each interview constitutes a single perspective, and there may be divergent recollections of the same event, disagreement over facts and emphases, and gaps in each individual's memory that make historical reconstruction more challenging.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes only the transcript is available. By making an auditory source into a written one, this introduces bias into the project by imposing punctuation and grammatical form, and disregarding the understanding that can be gained through tone and velocity of speech.<sup>8</sup> The content and form of memories are influenced by the social context in which they are reproduced at interview. Distortions in memory may occur as time progresses and the values held by the interviewees change.<sup>9</sup> The interviewer's choice of hypotheses; the gaps in their research agenda and interpersonal factors — such as dress, speech, manners, gender, class, age, race, ethnicity or ideology — all matter.<sup>10</sup>

Oral historians attempt to minimise the bias present in interviews. Advocates of a more 'scientific' methodology recommend the use of a consistent and structured questionnaire, with the interviewer keeping control of the flow and focus of the

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<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

<sup>6</sup> Weintraub, Autobiographical memory.

<sup>7</sup> Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; Thomson, Anzac memories; Thomson, *Fifty years on*; Walker, Malkowski and Smith Pfister, *A choreography of living texts*.

<sup>8</sup> Portelli, What makes oral history different. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; Thomson, Anzac memories.

<sup>10</sup> Portelli, What makes oral history different. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*; James, *Doña María's story*; Yow, 'Do I like them too much?'

interview while still maintaining a neutral and objective presence.<sup>11</sup> However, reducing oral history to a set of techniques is like ‘reducing courtship to a formula’.<sup>12</sup> Others emphasize more practical aspects such as the value of preparation, the need to establish rapport, the ability to listen and ask open-ended questions, the importance of allowing for pauses and silence, minimising the presence of the recording device, adopting methods of sampling from the social sciences, and having some rules for determining the reliability and internal consistency of sources.<sup>13</sup> As an interview is a relationship embedded in a specific social and cultural context, there is no single ‘right’ way to conduct oral history.

### 3. THE APPLICATION OF ORAL HISTORY TO THE STUDY OF INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITIES

Researchers are increasingly aware of the limitations of written sources to the study of intellectual history and the development of scholarly communities. Written sources rarely include details of how scholars practice their craft, why they pursued certain topics, and the personal factors and relationships that motivated them. By directly targetting these aspects, oral history can contribute nuanced aspects of what it means to ‘do research’ that is often missing from private and public records.<sup>14</sup> Complementing and verifying material from written sources, interviews enhance the understanding of how intellectual communities develop, how ideas form, and how individuals influence each other. Relatedly, oral history has been used within a wider ‘life history’ framework, complementing a full suite of sources such as correspondence, autobiography, photographs, official records as well as interviews to reconstruct history for individuals or groups.<sup>15</sup> The dialectic between oral and written sources is emphasised, with each source revealing the strengths of the other.<sup>16</sup>

The most extensive application of oral history to the discussion of scholarly communities has been through the broad availability of published interview transcripts with elite scholars. Many universities have oral history projects, in which career recollections and life histories are collected for emeritus faculty, nobel laureates or important administrative figures.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, periodicals have reproduced transcripts with eminent scholars: relevant examples for Australia’s economic history community include interviews with Max Corden and Bob Gregory, and a series of interviews in the

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

<sup>12</sup> Morrissey, On oral history interviewing, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup> Morrissey, On oral history interviewing; Portelli, What makes oral history different; Thomson, Fifty years on.

<sup>14</sup> Doel, Oral history; Weiner, Oral history of science.

<sup>15</sup> Emmett, Oral history; Mata and Lee, The role of oral history; Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*; Weiner, Oral history of science.

<sup>16</sup> Doel, Oral history.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the ANU’s emeritus faculty oral history project.

*Journal of Urban History* in the late 1970s.<sup>18</sup> While these are valuable resources as general life histories, they are often collected without the opportunity for further analysis of specific research questions. In some cases, by neither verifying the source's veracity, nor compiling it with others of the same milieu, transcripts become mere musings rather than a rich comparative source to enhance the narrative of scholarly communities. Exceptionally, several oral history projects have specifically analysed the development of research fields and communities. Starting with Thomas S. Kuhn's study of the ageing leaders of the quantum physics revolution of the mid-1920s, the history of science has seen the most work.<sup>19</sup> The history of economics, philosophy, political thought, medicine, are among those that have been studied.<sup>20</sup>

The earliest uses of oral history to study intellectual communities tended to focus on the workings of a scholar's mind, looking at the development of ideas and a research agenda throughout each individual's life. More recently, the emphasis has shifted to reconstructing a particular intellectual tradition from within its cultural, institutional and political context.<sup>21</sup> Doing so has provided insight into the impact of collective professional identities, patterns of university funding, political and religious affiliations, and other contextual factors.<sup>22</sup>

The individual or the discipline remains the most widely studied intellectual phenomena, with oral history rarely used to study interdisciplinary fields. The infrastructure of disciplines, including research centres, departments and learned societies, are crucial to understanding the contextual factors that underlie intellectual trends. This makes the study of interdisciplinary fields more challenging, as members are often on the margins of disciplines, lacking the structures and professional identities that make the identification of key individuals possible. A few exceptions include studies that use oral history to understand transient interdisciplinary projects. The Greenland Ice Sheet Project interviewed a mixture of researchers, university administrators and policy-makers, and the US National Centre for Atmospheric Research conducted interviews with individuals from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. Individuals interviewed by these projects were either united by research into a common problem, or were associated with a common institution.<sup>23</sup>

The relative neglect of interdisciplinary fields is particularly unfortunate, as they have been viewed as an important source of innovation and the key to addressing many

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<sup>18</sup> Coleman, 'The power of simple theory'; Coleman, A conversation with Max Corden; Stave, A conversation with Graeme Davison.

<sup>19</sup> For a review of these, see Doel, Oral history; Weiner, Oral history of science.

<sup>20</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*; Craver, The emigration of the Austrian economists; Emmett, Oral history; Mata and Lee, The role of oral history; Morrissey, Oral history; Tomes, Oral history in the history of medicine; Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*; Weintraub, Autobiographical memory.

<sup>21</sup> Doel, Oral history; Emmett, Oral history; Mata and Lee, The role of oral history; Weiner, Oral history of science.

<sup>22</sup> Doel, Oral history.

<sup>23</sup> Doel, Oral history.

complex problems of the modern world.<sup>24</sup> There is significant social, public and political advocacy for interdisciplinary research, which has manifested through studies of contemporary interdisciplinary fields.<sup>25</sup> Despite an acknowledgment that longitudinal historical studies may reveal much about the success and failure of interdisciplinary fields, many of the historical dynamics of these fields remain unknown.<sup>26</sup>

Intellectual history thus may be crucial to understanding how interdisciplinary fields form and develop. As interdisciplinary fields lack disciplinary infrastructures such as intellectual paradigms, strong professional relationships and clear institutional boundaries, we argue that traditional sources for intellectual history are inadequate on their own.<sup>27</sup> The analysis of published material and other written sources captures less of the dynamics of interdisciplinary fields than is necessary for their study over time. The qualities of oral history – shifting attention away from the elite, recording a wide range of perspectives, and emphasising flexibility, creativity and nuance between individual accounts – suggest it has much to contribute to the study of interdisciplinary fields.

Australian economic history is the interdisciplinary field that is the subject of this study. Oral history has been used to study the economic history field elsewhere, with Lyons et al. compiling interviews with those who participated in the US cliometrics revolution of the postwar period.<sup>28</sup> Similar personal reflections, albeit written ones, have been compiled for the development of economic history in Britain.<sup>29</sup> Both include a brief introduction, with Lyons et al. introducing the theoretical practice of cliometrics and Hudson commenting on the main themes that emerge from the wide range of participants assembled from the British community. Although the discussion of interpersonal relationships, institutional factors and the role of economic history complement the material available in published sources, neither text attempts to form a narrative of the economic history field - of how it has developed, the challenges it has faced, and how it has (or has not) overcome them. Further, there is no analysis of the extent to which these reflections enhance or revise the traditional understanding of the economic history field in the US or Britain. In light of the importance of combining interviews with written sources, we argue that these studies have not made the best use of the oral history methodology.

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<sup>24</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; Lyall and Meagher, *A masterclass in interdisciplinarity*; Page, *The Difference*; Rafols, Leydesdorff, O'Hare, Nightingale and Stirling, *How journal rankings*; Rijnsoever and Hessels, *Factors*.

<sup>25</sup> Gable, Gregor, Clarke, Ridley and Smyth, *The Information Systems Academic Discipline*; Gibson, *Geography in Higher Education*; Hess, *Bourdieu and Science Studies*; Pfister, *Coproducing European Integration Studies*; Raasch, Lee, Spaeth and Herstatt, *The rise and fall of interdisciplinary research*; Rafols, Leydesdorff, O'Hare, Nightingale and Stirling, *How journal rankings*.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs and Frickel, *Interdisciplinarity*.

<sup>27</sup> Grigg, *Cross-disciplinary research*; Klein, *Crossing Boundaries*; Klein, *Interdisciplinary needs*; Woelert and Millar, *The 'paradox of interdisciplinarity'*.

<sup>28</sup> Lyons, Cain and Williamson, *Reflections on the Cliometrics Revolution*.

<sup>29</sup> Hudson, *Living Economic and Social History*.



#### 4. A CONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE OF AUSTRALIA'S ECONOMIC HISTORY COMMUNITY IN THE POST-WORLD WAR II PERIOD

There has been some interest in the development of the Australian economic history community. Fitzpatrick's 1963 general survey of changes to Australian historiography is the first discussion of the development of the field, with several other overviews following this.<sup>30</sup> There is a consensus that, prior to WWII, the works of T. A. Coghlan, E. O. G. Shann and Brian Fitzpatrick formed the core of the 'analytical school' of economic history, with other isolated contributions rounding out the field in the interwar period.<sup>31</sup> The approach was unified by a focus on rural industries, a close intellectual relationship with the history discipline, and a realist, structuralist and narrative-based presentation.<sup>32</sup> By the 1950s the field had experienced some growth, but remained unbalanced with an emphasis on banking and rural industry studies.<sup>33</sup>

The so-called 'orthodox' approach to economic history emerged with the publication of two major studies in the early 1960s by Noel Butlin, who had been appointed to the Research School of Social Sciences ANU in 1951, and Professor of Economic History 1961 to 1986.<sup>34</sup> These texts represented a 'maturation', 'reorientation', 'watershed' or 'revolution', with Butlin's approach characterised by the collection and use of previously neglected national statistics, the more explicit application of neoclassical economic theory, and the increased reference to national income accounting techniques.<sup>35</sup> His contribution was such that 'subsequent writing on the subject has been either a direct outgrowth from Butlin or was influenced by him in some way'.<sup>36</sup> Butlin's work also shifted the thematic emphasis of economic history, with the growth of non-primary industries and domestic determinants of growth taking centre stage. Butlin's contribution cemented him as an intellectual leader, as well as inspiring a number of other texts in a similar vein.<sup>37</sup> Overall, Australian economic history developed a

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<sup>30</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Fitzpatrick, *Counter revolution*; Jetson, *Economic history*; Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Lloyd, *Can economic history be the core of social science*; Lloyd, *Economic history and policy*; Morgan and Shanahan, *The supply of economic history*; Pincus and Snooks, *The past and future role*; Schedvin, *Australian economic history*; Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*; Sinclair, *Economic history*.

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*.

<sup>32</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Lloyd, *Economic history and policy*; Sinclair, *Economic history*.

<sup>33</sup> Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*.

<sup>34</sup> Butlin, *Australian Domestic Product*; Butlin, *Investment*. Jetson, *Economic history*; Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*; Sinclair, *Economic history*.

<sup>35</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Lloyd, *Economic history and policy*; Schedvin, *Australian economic history*; Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*.

<sup>36</sup> Sinclair, *Economic history*, p. 245.

<sup>37</sup> Lloyd, *Economic history and policy*; Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*; Sinclair, *Economic history*.

methodological consensus, a consistent research agenda, and a closer relationship with the economics discipline.<sup>38</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s are seen as the high point of the field. There was a rapid expansion of researchers and students, an increase in the number of Chairs and separate economic history departments, a growing number of articles and monographs, a specialised journal from 1956, and a conference from 1969.<sup>39</sup> The more explicit economic framework gave economic history focus, identity, respect and autonomy within economics faculties, with general historians more or less keeping their distance.<sup>40</sup> The uniqueness of Australian economic history at this time has been discussed, though only very loose unifying characteristics have been identified.<sup>41</sup> It is argued that the approach was not wholly imported from overseas, instead developing through Coghlan's emphasis on statistics combined with Kuznets' national income accounting.<sup>42</sup> From this, a major characteristic of the approach has been to 'under-interpret', letting the numbers speak for themselves.<sup>43</sup>

From the 1980s, change was afoot. Departments of economic history began to merge with larger departments (often as a part of the economics group), there was a slow attrition of permanent appointments and Chairs, undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers began to dwindle, and membership of the Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand declined.<sup>44</sup> Some have argued that the growing specialisation and increasing technical emphasis of economic history meant that methodological differences began to divide the ranks of economic historians and the resources available to them.<sup>45</sup> Possibly, the research consensus was dislodged by a swing in the ideological pendulum to the right, challenging the preceding interest in wage regulation, financial control, state enterprise and protectionism.<sup>46</sup> A third explanation is that the close intellectual relationship with economics meant that the field became increasingly insular and less distinctive.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to this, there are several small points of contention or omission in the conventional narrative. The extent to which the orthodox approach was a branch of the cliometrics revolution is disputed. It is argued that while cliometrics would be a natural

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<sup>38</sup> Lloyd, *Economic History and Policy*; Pincus and Snooks, *The past and future role*; Sinclair, *Economic history*.

<sup>39</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Morgan and Shanahan, *The supply of economic history*; Pincus and Snooks, *The past and future role*.

<sup>40</sup> Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*.

<sup>41</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Schedvin, *Australian economic history*.

<sup>42</sup> Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Schedvin, *Australian economic history*.

<sup>43</sup> Schedvin, *Australian economic history*, p. 288.

<sup>44</sup> Lloyd, *Can economic history be the core of social science*; Morgan and Shanahan, *The supply of economic history*; Nicholas, *The future of economic history*.

<sup>45</sup> Jetson, *Economic history*; Pincus and Snooks, *The past and future role*.

<sup>46</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*.

<sup>47</sup> Lloyd, *Can economic history be the core of social science*; Morgan and Shanahan, *The supply of economic history*; Nicholas, *The future of economic history*; Pincus and Snooks, *The past and future role*.

progression from Butlin's quantification and national accounts, this work did not, in itself, qualify as cliometrics.<sup>48</sup> This is because Butlin focussed on inductive analysis from quantitative source material, rather than deductive model-building.<sup>49</sup> Others argue that 'there has been no serious challenge to cliometrics in this country', with the 'severely conceptual' nature of Butlin's work resembling aspects of the cliometrics approach.<sup>50</sup> There has been no analysis of the impact of the British style of economic history in Australia, beyond Richards' comment that the Butlin revolution was a 'shock' and 'did not blend well with the British tradition of that day'.<sup>51</sup> However, the literature for the most part agrees on the narrative of the economic history field in the postwar period: of the increased size and autonomy of the community during the 1960s and 1970s, and the progressive break-up of this community from around the 1980s.

An intellectual approach to discussing the development of the field has been generally adopted.<sup>52</sup> While this approach is also followed in a number of other countries and continents - Britain, Canada, India, Africa and Latin America - for others the impact of institutional and contextual factors are included. In the US, Denmark and Japan, rapid growth in the economic history field is attributed to government postwar expansion of the higher education system. For the US, other institutional factors are also examined, including the structure of universities and the development of community-building activities such as learned societies, conferences and seminars.<sup>53</sup> For Denmark, institutional integration of economic historians within departments in the humanities and social sciences is argued to have contributed to a more holistic approach to the subject.<sup>54</sup> In Japan there is a greater emphasis on the impact of state encouragement of the humanities and social sciences, along with the role of various learned societies.<sup>55</sup> Crucially, these studies link institutional or contextual changes to the development of ideas in the field.

By using published texts as the primary unit of analysis, the conventional narrative of Australia's economic history field lacks a number of key elements. Firstly, institutional factors are weakly engaged as a force in the development of the community. The expansion of researchers and students within universities is mentioned, but it is quoted as evidence of the success of the field rather than something that had an impact on relationships among members and on the development of ideas. Secondly, the experience of the economic history field in Australia is generally aggregated nationwide,

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<sup>48</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Jetson, *Economic history*; Lloyd, *Economic history and policy*.

<sup>49</sup> Lloyd, *Economic history and policy*, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> Schedvin, *Australian economic history*, p. 288.; Richards, *The Australian option*.

<sup>51</sup> Richards, *The Australian option*, pp. 303-4.

<sup>52</sup> Coleman, *The historiography of Australian economic history*; Jetson, *Economic history*; Lloyd, *Analytical frameworks*; Lloyd, *Economic history and Policy*; Schedvin, *Australian economic history*; Schedvin, *Midas and the merino*.

<sup>53</sup> Coats, *The Historical context*; Coats, *Disciplinary self-examination*; Lyons, Cain and Williamson, *Reflections on the cliometrics revolution*.

<sup>54</sup> Boje, *Danish economic history*.

<sup>55</sup> Mehl, *Historiography and the State*.

disregarding the experiences of members at different universities or in different cities and the personal interactions that accompanied localisation. Thirdly, the contribution of economic historians to the community is evaluated based on their texts rather than their involvement in the numerous activities that make up the job of a scholar. While participation in the journal has been covered,<sup>56</sup> involvement in seminars, the society, or in higher administrative roles has been generally overlooked. We aim to contribute to an understanding of Australia's economic history field by addressing these key elements.

## 5. CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF AUSTRALIA'S ECONOMIC HISTORY COMMUNITY

The oral history methodology is new to Australian economic history: none of the individuals included in our study had been previously interviewed about their experiences in economic history. In addition, the project is a timely one in light of the age profile of the cohort.

For this project, individuals were initially selected based on their status as key members of the economic history field from 1950 to 1990 (see table 1). It included those who were editors of the journal, those who were heavily involved in the society, or those that made substantial contributions to the literature of the field. For example, all editors of the *AEHR* at this time were approached for an interview, as were many that held appointments at the key institutions for the community. Within this, the focus was economic historians who were located in Australia and working on Australian topics. Noel Butlin's key role in the field was also recognised, and select members of his familial and professional network were approached. From this initial selection pool, further participants were approached based on the recommendations of earlier interviewees, with the list expanding beyond our initial expectations. This had the benefit of including those whose limited formal contributions to the field (through published literature or specific leadership roles) had precluded them from the initial list, but who were important to the community through their personal interactions. Through these various criteria, those we approached form, we argue, the 'core' Australian economic history community in this period. Several individuals declined an interview, or were unable to participate. However, we found encouraging interest in the project overall, with most people happy to share their insights.

The criteria adopted here has some limitations. Firstly, there was a substantial number of economic historians at the time who were engaged in overseas topics, and a number who were resident overseas but working on Australian topics. Secondly, the boundaries of this field are permeable, with extensive interactions with academics who were largely

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<sup>56</sup> Morgan and Shanahan, The supply of economic history.

members of the history or economics discipline. However, including these other groups would extend the size of the interview group to unmanageable proportions, and would force much broader lines of investigation. This, in our view, would sacrifice the benefits of the rich, detailed material we have included below. In addition, by focussing on those located in Australia and working on Australian topics, our selection enables us to evaluate the contributions of both published work and social networks in the development of a scholarly community.

*Table 1: Interview participants*

<i>Who</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Primary university affiliation</i>
Pat Troy	Canberra	February 2015	ANU
Bob Gregory	Canberra	February 2015	ANU
Selwyn Cornish	Canberra	February 2015	ANU
David Merrett	Melbourne	March 2015	Monash/Melbourne
Stuart Macintyre	Melbourne	March 2015	Melbourne
Gus Sinclair	Melbourne	March 2015	Monash/Melbourne
Geoffrey Blainey	Melbourne	March 2015	Melbourne
Matthew Butlin	Melbourne	March 2015	n.a.
Alan Hall	Sydney	June 2015	ANU
Ian McLean	Adelaide	July 2015	Adelaide
Jonathan Pincus	Adelaide	July 2015	Flinders
Boris Schedvin	Melbourne	July 2015	Monash/Melbourne
Tony Dingle	Melbourne	July 2015	Monash
Graeme Davison	Melbourne	July 2015	Monash/Melbourne
Rod Maddock	Melbourne	December 2015	ANU
Bob Jackson	Canberra	March 2016	ANU
Peter Shergold	Sydney	March 2016	UNSW
Pamela Statham	Perth	April 2016	UWA
Stephen Nicholas	Sydney	April 2016	UNSW
Diane Hutchinson	Sydney	April 2016	Sydney
Mac Boot	Canberra	April 2016	ANU

Interviews were conducted one to one, with the exception of Tony Dingle and Graeme Davison, who were interviewed together. Interviews ranged in length from about 45

minutes to two hours, beyond which it was felt there were marginal gains and increasing fatigue. Except for a few fact-gathering enquiries, lines of questioning focussed on relevant themes but were generally open-ended, encouraging interviewees to say what they thought rather than what the interviewer might want to hear. Questions focussed on professional and social networks, the economic history community at various locations and in Australia more generally, their approach to economic history, and the links between economic history and other fields. Inconsistencies were not corrected by the interviewer, though occasionally interviewees were prompted if they could not remember certain minor details. Interviewees were given the option to not to answer questions with which they were uncomfortable, in order to avoid issues of sensitive material.<sup>57</sup>

The interviews have produced a series of detailed qualitative sources that describe the formation and development of Australia's economic history community. There are a number of important points of consensus, which is suggestive of the reliability of these sources. Since the great majority of those approached for interview were available and willing to participate, this has helped to reconstruct and reflect the range of standpoints that existed. Interviews have opened up new lines of enquiry, with the narrative no longer confined to written records or published works. Interacting with economic historians has allowed us to target directly those aspects of the existing literature that are missing, or not as well-developed as we would like. In particular, we have gained additional understanding of the interviewees' influences, attitudes and approaches to the subject, the experience of the community at different locations, and the complex web of personal interactions.

The characteristics that have made these interviews unique and valuable sources have also introduced bias into the study.<sup>58</sup> Some interviewees were quite elderly, and had incomplete or incorrect memories. Interviews were undoubtedly subjective, reflecting the specific personalities and experiences of the participant. For example, they generally viewed their home institution as significant beyond the importance others would attribute it. Those involved in the Society, the journal or in large collaborative works, tended to highlight those as the crucial factors for the development of the community, simply because they were the crucial factors for the development of *their* community. Thus, participants' memories were limited by their own experiences, and significant contributions and contributors to the field may have been overlooked. Interviews may have been interrupted if they were held in a public place, or may have been limited by the time available for the interview. Sources have also been affected by the personalities of each party involved, their mood on the day, their age, their gender and the outcome of

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<sup>57</sup> This was a condition imposed by the University of Wollongong's Human Research Ethics Committee. It is also a common practice in oral history and, we felt, an important part of making sure interviewees felt comfortable to talk freely. Interviewees had the option of either not answering questions, or having responses 'off the record'. In practice, this was not an option taken by very many interviewees, with most happy to answer all questions. It thus only minimally affected the content of interviews.

<sup>58</sup> Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*; Thomson, *Anzac memories*; Thomson, *Fifty years on*; Walker, Malkowski and Smith Pfister, *A choreography of living texts*.

any prior interactions.<sup>59</sup> We have not necessarily corrected for bias, indeed one of the compelling aspects of this methodology is seeing where bias emerges, and why. We have adopted many of the practical aspects recommended by oral historians, including sufficient preparation, collecting a range of responses, and identifying internal inconsistencies.<sup>60</sup> Our discussion of findings below has depended on corroborating accounts across interviewees where possible, and with written sources where appropriate.

## 6. THE IMPACT OF ORAL HISTORY ON THE NARRATIVE OF AUSTRALIAN ECONOMIC HISTORY

There are many respects in which the oral history approach reaffirms what we know about the rise of the economic history field in Australia from about the 1950s. From the scholarly practices of a small and relatively fragmented group of academics in the first half of the century, interviewees confirmed the emergence of a larger, more coherent network of scholars in the postwar period, gathered around some key personalities, institutions and intellectual concepts.

The abiding influence of Noel Butlin, apparent from the extensive citation of his key works, was widely reaffirmed through personal recollections. His innovative research style, his willingness to tackle the big questions, and his determined pursuit of sources, including unearthing archives, were recurring themes.<sup>61</sup> Going beyond published works, interviews revealed that Butlin's influence played out in diverse ways, particularly through his remarkable ability to harness the resources of the ANU. This was initially by lobbying for a separate economic history department, and then through the establishment of an extensive visiting scholars program, a joint project on the development of cities, and the Coghlan research chair.<sup>62</sup> Butlin's strength of personality also complicated his influence on the community. Some suggested Butlin was discouraging or overbearing, particularly for younger members of the discipline and those that may have looked to him for PhD supervision.<sup>63</sup> Scholars responded in different ways to Butlin – some revelled in the hard-edged criticism, others are reported to have struggled. Neville Cain, whose early work on pastoralism was important, appears to have fallen into the latter category, moving into areas other than economic history from the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> Some went as far as to suggest that Butlin's powerful personality, and the ensuing disharmony between individuals in the field, may have

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<sup>59</sup> Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*; James, *Doña María's story*; Portelli, What makes oral history different; Yow, 'Do I like them too much?.'

<sup>60</sup> Morrissey, On oral history interviewing; Portelli, What makes oral history different; Thomson, Fifty years on.

<sup>61</sup> Boot; Davison; Dingle; Gregory; Macintyre; Pincus; Sinclair; Troy interviews.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory; Hall; Statham; Troy interviews.

<sup>63</sup> Macintyre; Merrett interviews.

<sup>64</sup> Cornish; Gregory; Macintyre; Merrett; Pincus; Schedvin interviews.

contributed to the later struggles of economic history.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, though Butlin's intellectual contribution was extraordinary, a number of interviewees argued that he was 'too dominant',<sup>66</sup> and that his influence over the research agenda may have pulled the field in unexpected ways.<sup>67</sup> It was been argued that he took the field to the frontier of innovation in economic history in the 1950s, but found it harder to adopt new approaches and assist the community's transition when, later, the frontier shifted.<sup>68</sup>

Influences, therefore, are exercised in a variety of manners within intellectual networks not always apparent from the extant written record. Some 'influencers' publish relatively little but their impact is felt through their role as referee, critic, mentor and supervisor. In Britain, the London School of Economics (LSE) economic historian Jack Fisher, who published very little himself, was cited by many of his contemporaries as a major influence on the careers of a generation of economic historians, many of whom had studied at LSE in the 1960s.<sup>69</sup> In Australia, John McCarty was described as such a person – very bright, published very little, but highly collegial and supportive of the intellectual endeavours and careers of others.<sup>70</sup> 'Gus' Sinclair was seen as intellectually influential in the community for his 'sharp, sparse mind' that cut right to the core of whatever issue he was working on, as well as for his ability to form a cogent explanation of Australian economic development from 1788.<sup>71</sup> Sinclair was also influential for his professional interactions, taking on leadership roles in the community, and forming an important conduit between economic historians in Melbourne and the ANU.<sup>72</sup> Boris Schedvin was an outstanding scholar but also an encouraging colleague who provided stimulus for profitable future areas of research.<sup>73</sup> Syd Butlin, Noel's older brother, was remembered for his 'fastidious' and 'perfectionist' research style, characterised by the use of a wealth of primary source material, limited formal economic theory, and a skilled, though somewhat convoluted command of the written word.<sup>74</sup> In addition to these intellectual influences, Syd Butlin was remembered for his encouragement of the

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<sup>65</sup> Cornish; Dingle; Gregory; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>66</sup> Hall interview.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory; Hall; McLean interviews.

<sup>68</sup> McLean; Sinclair; M Butlin interviews.

<sup>69</sup> Hudson, *Living Economic and Social History*, p. xiv.

<sup>70</sup> Blainey; Davison; Merrett; Schedvin; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>71</sup> Merrett interview. Schedvin argued that Sinclair's *The process of economic development in Australia* was important by giving Butlin's initial contribution important 'shape', with Hall agreeing that the volume was a valuable, 'vintage summary' of Butlin's work.

<sup>72</sup> Dingle recalled that Sinclair was an early proponent of the economic history society. Sinclair also had institutional leadership roles such as Dean of Monash's Economics and Politics Faculty in the 1980s. Blainey recalled that Sinclair was the main connection between the economic historians in Melbourne and Canberra. This is supported by Merrett commenting that Sinclair both supervised his Masters topic, and send him to the ANU to meet Butlin and discuss possible thesis topics early on in the process.

<sup>73</sup> His impressive research achievements were remembered by Macintyre; Dingle; Merrett; Pincus; Sinclair; Statham interviews. Merrett also recalled that it was Schedvin that first introduced him to business history, and that he was, overall, a 'phenomenal mentor'.

<sup>74</sup> Blainey; M Butlin; Gregory; Hall; Schedvin interviews.



field's institutions, hosting the journal at the University of Sydney, and applauding the development of the Society and conference.<sup>75</sup>

Overseas influences in the formation of ideas and methodologies came across more strongly than is generally captured through publications. Interviewees especially invoked American and British traditions that had been important in the formation of their human capital through studying their PhD or by subsequently drawing upon ideas and methods through discussion and conferences. There was a shift during the period in the location of overseas graduate training, with earlier scholars tending to complete PhDs in Britain. Sinclair, in particular, highlighted the influence of his PhD supervisor, Oxford economic historian John Habakkuk, on his subsequent approach to the subject. Later entrants to the community had stronger links with the US, with Pincus and Maddock completing PhDs at Stanford and Duke respectively. Pincus recalled that graduate studies at Stanford maintained his orientation towards economic history in the US, through the emphasis on cliometric techniques in his research, and various professional connections to US scholars. McLean also cited significant American influence, with time at Yale and a variety of other North American institutions giving him an 'expanded view' of economic history, reinvigorating his interest in the field, and helping to develop his approach.

Overseas influences were also exercised through the appointment of British economic historians to positions at Australian universities, often at the level of Professor.<sup>76</sup> Though there were some exceptions, a number of scholars commented that generally these individuals formed their own community, and continued working on British topics.<sup>77</sup> As one of a number of British appointments made at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in the 1970s, Shergold recalled that from his perspective, this was due to his expectation that his position at UNSW would be relatively temporary.<sup>78</sup> He stated that it was only after committing to a career in Australia that he began to work on Australian topics. In addition to graduate students, the American approach to economic history may have found an additional channel of influence through visiting scholars programs, in particular at the Australian National University (ANU) and Monash.<sup>79</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, the American approach seems to have integrated more with the core Australian economic history community, particularly through younger scholars.<sup>80</sup> Maddock argued that rather than working on American topics, interaction with the US community broadened the techniques used and the questions asked by some of the younger economic historians, expanding the toolkit that could be applied to antipodean research topics.

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<sup>75</sup> Dingle interview.

<sup>76</sup> Cornish; Merrett; Shergold; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>77</sup> Hutchinson; Sinclair; Shergold interviews.

<sup>78</sup> Though Shergold came to Australia from Britain, he specialised in American economic history.

<sup>79</sup> ANU: M Butlin; Gregory; Jackson; McLean; Pincus; Statham interviews. Monash: Dingle; Schedvin; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>80</sup> Maddock; McLean; Pincus interviews.

The interviews throw a richer light on intellectual debate and differences of approach within economic history. What has been identified previously as the 'orthodox' approach to economic history was largely confirmed. Butlin was a strong advocate of what he perceived as pioneering shifts in interpreting Australia's economic development. He believed that the focus hitherto on primary products and the role of exports should yield ground to closer investigation of manufacturing and the urban, domestic sources of economic growth, all of which necessitated a closer understanding of capital formation.<sup>81</sup> While some argued that this was the dominant approach, the 'multiplicity of standpoints' provided by oral accounts appear suggest a contested conversation or, at the very least, that people continued to work in other areas. The contribution of the Butlin group was therefore to extend the scope of economic history in Australia not simply to shift its focus.

An externalist push-back seems to have occurred in the 1960s, with Hall recalling that he published his PhD thesis, *The London Capital Market and Australia*, more than a decade after it was completed simply because it 'differed from Noel's view of the world'. McCarty's limited output was also outward-looking, particularly associated with staple theory, which stood in contrast to the internalist view of the sources of economic growth.<sup>82</sup> Comparative economic history, also associated with McCarty and others, generated much debate later in the period.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the interviews revealed more clearly fault-lines that existed geographically (more below) and even within the Butlin family through the approaches, rivalry perhaps, of Syd and Noel.<sup>84</sup>

The geographic orientation of the field is difficult to discern from academic publications, while organisational histories tend to focus on the infrastructure and progress of major disciplines rather than smaller fields. In England, the reflections of economic historians indicated that while LSE may have been a leader in the field, Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, and Leicester were also important nodes.<sup>85</sup> In Australia, Melbourne and Adelaide continued to flourish as key hotspots of economic history in the post-World War II period alongside the rapid ascendancy of the ANU. The generous funding of research-only positions at the ANU anointed it with leadership expectations but may have created tensions with longer established centres of scholarship. Dominance in the domestic training of PhD students also gave the ANU enduring influence even when students moved on to other universities.<sup>86</sup> Interviewees showed an awareness of an 'us and them' culture, reflecting not only a difference of approach (more below), but also envy towards the privilege that research-only economic historians experienced at the ANU and complaints of them not really pulling their weight with respect to the journal

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<sup>81</sup> Davison; Dingle; Hall; Hutchinson; Macintyre; Maddock; Merrett; Pincus; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>82</sup> Blainey; Dingle; Merrett; Schedvin; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>83</sup> Dingle; Merrett interviews.

<sup>84</sup> Davison; Dingle; Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>85</sup> Hudson, *Living Economic and Social History*.

<sup>86</sup> Schedvin; McLean interviews.

or the society.<sup>87</sup> Members of the ANU community tended to see themselves as the centre of economic history in Australia, in terms of research output, appointments and prestige.<sup>88</sup>

There majority of mobility and interaction occurred between universities located within the same city. Monash was seen as a lively, talented and well-funded group. Sinclair, McCarty, Schedvin, Dingle and Merrett were identified as the key members of the Monash economic history department in the 1970s, with Graeme Davison a key colleague from the history group.<sup>89</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the University of Melbourne was perceived as older, more entrenched, and in need of a bit of a shake-up.<sup>90</sup> Blainey was a member of history and economic history departments at different times from the 1960s, and Schedvin moved to the University of Melbourne from Monash in the late 1970s.<sup>91</sup> La Trobe, similar to Monash, was a new university with a young staff. However, they were established a little later and so did not have the advantage of being able to appoint the brightest Melbourne graduates, like Monash.<sup>92</sup> Sinclair was an important member of staff at La Trobe as well (in the early 1970s), and the British-Australian economic historian Eric Jones was remembered as the leader of the group in the 1980s.<sup>93</sup> Interactions between La Trobe and the University of Melbourne were relatively frequent in this period, as were the connections between Monash and Melbourne, though interactions were less common between La Trobe and Monash.<sup>94</sup> Dingle recalled broader co-operation through an inter-university seminar, in which economic historians from all three institutions would gather to present papers.<sup>95</sup> Interactions were less frequent within the city of Sydney, with only occasional seminars between the University of Sydney, Macquarie, and the University of New South Wales.<sup>96</sup> Several interviewees intimated that the Faculty at Sydney was a fairly volatile environment during this period.<sup>97</sup> Economic history in Adelaide was particularly strong in the 1970s and 1980s, including Pincus, McLean, Sinclair, Eric Richards, Graeme Snooks, Wray Vamplew and Ralph Shlomovitz at various times.<sup>98</sup> Interactions between economic historians at the University of Adelaide and Flinders were frequent, including seminars and joint teaching of the honours course.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Cornish; Maddock; McLean; Merrett; Pincus interviews.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory; Maddock; McLean; Pincus interviews.

<sup>89</sup> Blainey; Dingle; Hutchinson; Macintyre; Merrett; Schedvin; Sinclair; Statham interviews.

<sup>90</sup> Davison; Schedvin; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>91</sup> Blainey; Hutchinson; Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>92</sup> Sinclair interview.

<sup>93</sup> Merrett; Sinclair interviews. Maddock and Nicholas recalled Jones' prominence at La Trobe in the 1980s.

<sup>94</sup> For Melbourne: Blainey; Macintyre interviews. For Monash: Merrett interview.

<sup>95</sup> The structure was generally 2 sessions with participants sharing a meal together in between. Dingle recalled that the second session was usually considerably more 'lively'.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholas; Shergold interviews.

<sup>97</sup> Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>98</sup> Macintyre; Pincus; Sinclair; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>99</sup> Hutchinson; Pincus interviews.

Interviewees drew attention to spatial differences in cultures and intellectual orientations. The core of this was the emphasis upon quantitative evidence, Kuznetzian national income accounting, and the construction of neoclassical production functions in Canberra.<sup>100</sup> This was initially led by Butlin, and then by his colleagues and Butlin's PhD students who shared a degree of commonality in approach.<sup>101</sup> There was, as Dingle described, a 'clear difference of approach' between Melbourne and Canberra. A broader sense of intellectual inquiry existed in Melbourne that included a diverse set of approaches from economics and history with stronger links across disciplinary borders.<sup>102</sup> Comparative economic history was particularly characteristic of those at Monash University, where the work of Fernand Braudel and the Annales School was championed by McCarty.<sup>103</sup>

At the University of Sydney, research was concentrated at the nexus of history, economic history and political economy, linking more closely to urban history research led by Gary Wotherspoon, and the university's strength in political economy through Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright.<sup>104</sup> The contribution of the University of Sydney community was also argued to be through the training of a number of key individuals, and early editorship of the *Australian Economic History Review (AEHR)*.<sup>105</sup> Syd Butlin's key role in the Sydney community was highlighted.<sup>106</sup> Also in Sydney, the UNSW economic history group expanded rapidly from the early 1970s to become one of the largest in Australia, with a number of interviewees mentioning that the collaborative convict project of the 1980s was particularly influential.<sup>107</sup> Those at Adelaide and Flinders were more closely tied to economics, both institutionally and through a greater integration with the US approach to the subject.<sup>108</sup>

The geographic distinctiveness of approaches is suggestive of a pluralist field in which proximity and local person to person interactions mattered as much as the conversations conducted through the pages of scholarly publications. Blainey referred to the 'spatial placement of ideas', and Hutchinson argued that the greatest influence on her approach to the subject was through those in her local community. Both noted the limited influence of Noel Butlin and his cadre beyond Canberra. Perhaps constrained by the tyranny of distance, there appears to have been limited visits among the centres, with Statham in particular recalling a sense of isolation amongst her and her colleagues at the University of Western Australia (UWA). It was thus largely left to the conferences, the journal, and several relocations to provide the main vehicles for personal

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<sup>100</sup> Cornish; Dingle; Hall; Merrett interviews.

<sup>101</sup> M Butlin; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>102</sup> Dingle; Hutchinson; Macintyre; Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>103</sup> Dingle; Merrett interviews.

<sup>104</sup> Boot; Macintyre; Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>105</sup> Dingle; Hall; Macintyre; Blainey; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>106</sup> M Butlin; Dingle; Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>107</sup> Dingle; Hutchinson; Maddock; Nicholas; Pincus; Shergold interviews. The convict project culminated in Nicholas, ed. *Convict Workers*.

<sup>108</sup> Hutchinson; McLean; Pincus; Sinclair; Schedvin interviews.

interaction. The most notable cross-fertilisation between different communities occurred as a result of relocations of academics among Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra,<sup>109</sup> while the movement of PhD students into lectureships elsewhere also contributed to the diffusion of ideas and contacts.<sup>110</sup>

Geographic pluralism is taken one step further by discussion of the impact of institutional structures on the field. Independent economic history departments were established in a number of Australian universities in the postwar period, with Dingle arguing that this may have facilitated the independence and identity of the community. Others criticised the establishment of separate departments, arguing that the small numbers of scholars made them unsustainable.<sup>111</sup> Separate departments may have also restricted the flow of ideas around the university. The fragmented structure of the ANU, with multiple departments of economics, economic history, history and econometrics, was especially affected.<sup>112</sup> In the ANU's Research School of Social Sciences, departments were independent entities, answerable only to the Director. Each had their own seminar and collaborations, but there seems to have been little initiative for inter-departmental projects or contact.<sup>113</sup> McLean and Statham, in particular, contrasted this with their experiences at the University of Adelaide and UWA respectively, where economic historians were integrated into large and diverse departments of economics. This issue seems to have pervaded elsewhere, with others recalling limited contact outside their immediate institutional sub-structure.<sup>114</sup>

Some informal routines may have helped to moderate the sense of disconnection. The 'tea room' culture at the time was quite significant, with an expectation on individuals from different disciplines in the faculty to gather and discuss ideas over morning tea.<sup>115</sup> Unlikely pairings became sounding boards for each other, and administrative matters such as PhD supervision were settled.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, sometimes geographic proximity was sufficient to overcome institutional separateness, with those located in the same building or on the same floor becoming close collaborators.<sup>117</sup> Jackson also recalled various sports codes in which the different departments of the ANU Faculties would

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<sup>109</sup> Gregory; Sinclair; Davison interviews. There was a number of relocations between the University of Melbourne and the Canberra University College, later the General Faculty of the ANU, which included Herbert Burton, Graeme Tucker and Colin Forster. Sinclair held positions in Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide. Both McCarty and Schedvin held early positions at the University of Sydney before longer tenures in Melbourne. Noel Butlin and Hall spent brief periods at the University of Sydney before longer careers in Canberra.

<sup>110</sup> Jackson and Schedvin recalled their PhDs at the University of Sydney; Hutchinson recalled her PhD at UNSW; McLean and Davison remembered their time as PhD students at the ANU. All then went on to work in other cities.

<sup>111</sup> Hall; Nicholas; Pincus interviews.

<sup>112</sup> Cornish; McLean interviews.

<sup>113</sup> Gregory; Hall; Maddock; McLean interviews.

<sup>114</sup> Davison; Dingle interview.

<sup>115</sup> Hall; Davison; Maddock; Troy; Sinclair interviews for the RSSH. Boot; Cornish; Jackson interviews for the 'Faculties'. Davison; Merrett; Schedvin interviews for Monash.

<sup>116</sup> Hall; Davison interview.

<sup>117</sup> Gregory; Schedvin; Sinclair interviews.

compete, arguing that social activities made it much easier to ask those from other disciplines for ideas or assistance. However, on the whole, the fragmented institutional structure that became normal for economic history at this time tended to decrease the opportunities for collaboration and innovation with other fields. This then had an impact on the research that was produced, with interviewees arguing that it decreased the dynamism and intellectual complexity of the economic history community.<sup>118</sup>

Published works provide limited guidance about the infrastructure that supports and promotes an intellectual field – its academic society, its journal and its meetings. Typically, records of editorial meetings and conferences are sparse and restricted to noting decisions. Interviews helped to fill some of these gaps although many remain. We know little of the manner in which the Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand (EHSANZ) was run and indeed exactly when it was formed. Forster, Barnard and Sinclair may have been its earliest proponents.<sup>119</sup> The first meeting appears to have been held in Canberra around 1970, with the society then running annual (or so) conferences and taking over the management and operation of the *AEHR*.<sup>120</sup> The society played a valuable role in coordinating the activities of a field in its growth phase, supporting the flourishing university appointments at the time.<sup>121</sup> Dingle was the society's first secretary. Butlin refused to be involved in the establishment of an organisation for the field or indeed attend the conferences.<sup>122</sup> This may have been because of his focus on the ANU group of researchers.

The development of the journal has been discussed elsewhere recently, with Morgan and Shanahan surveying previous contributions as well as discussing written reflections from former editors.<sup>123</sup> Given that former editors were sought out for this project, interviews unsurprisingly confirm several key points. There were repeated comments from former editors of the *AEHR* that finding a good supply of quality papers has been a challenge and required proactive behaviour.<sup>124</sup> Editors expended significant effort in soliciting contributions from the conference and in preparing manuscripts. The review process could be a bit 'amateurish', involving a fairly deft touch, with articles accepted in a broad range of disciplinary areas.<sup>125</sup> The journal was confirmed as playing a key role in the dissemination of ideas in the community,<sup>126</sup> with Merrett adding that the *AEHR* was key to the 'experimentation' that occurred in the field following Butlin's major contributions in the early 1960s. Interviews also added to the story of the journal by highlighting its effect on interactions between members of the field. Schedvin commented that through his involvement, he probably interacted with his co-editor

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<sup>118</sup> Macintyre; McLean interviews.

<sup>119</sup> Schedvin; Dingle interviews.

<sup>120</sup> Dingle; McLean; Pincus; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>121</sup> Boot; Dingle interview.

<sup>122</sup> Dingle interview.

<sup>123</sup> Morgan and Shanahan, *The supply of economic history*.

<sup>124</sup> Dingle; Merrett; Schedvin interviews.

<sup>125</sup> Merrett; Schedvin; Sinclair interviews.

<sup>126</sup> Merrett; Sinclair interviews.

Gordon Rimmer as much as he did with colleagues located in the same department. Dingle reiterated this, arguing that the journal was an important part of what brought different members of the community together. Pincus attributed his acquaintance with most economic historians, and his awareness of most research in the field, to his involvement with the journal. The *AEHR*, along with the EHSANZ and the conference, were thus a key part of the institutional framework that supported Australia's economic history field. This influenced both the dissemination of ideas, as well as interactions and communication, among scholars.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Oral history has provided a fresh window on the study of Australia's vibrant economic history community in its formative postwar years. It has confirmed, expanded and, in some cases, revised our received wisdom drawn mostly from written sources and published works. The oral history methodology is highly relevant to the study of intellectual communities where individuals engage with, and influence, each other in a myriad of ways, and is particularly important for the study of interdisciplinary fields whose unstable nature confounds analysis undertaken solely through written sources.

Interviews have generally confirmed the important influence of Noel and Syd Butlin, though our understanding of Noel's complex contribution becomes clearer by including a discussion of his interaction with the wider community. The elements of the orthodox approach to economic history are reaffirmed, though interviews have provided a fuller understanding of alternative approaches that existed alongside (or in response to) the orthodox approach. Intellectual influences were exercised through a multitude of channels not always evident from written sources, including mentoring, seminar discussions, research supervision, management roles, or involvement in the field's community activities. Interviews have shown a long-term influence from graduate studies abroad, with the dominant overseas research community shifting from Britain to the US over this period. We augment the standard, Australia-wide narrative by discussing the field at different locations, accounting for the spatial placement of ideas and the effect of geographic proximity. Interviews confirmed the key role of the journal in disseminating ideas, though they added that it also facilitated interpersonal interaction between those in different cities. The impact of institutional factors on the community has been discussed, with a number of interviewees arguing that although separate departments of economic history gave the field identity and independence, it decreased the opportunity for collaboration and intellectual foment with adjacent disciplines. This revisits the generally positive spin that is often put on the establishment of separate departments, and may provide some guidance for the challenges that the field experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. This discussion of the characteristics and dynamics of Australia's economic history community may also

inform the way in which the economic history field, and similar interdisciplinary groups, are managed in the future.



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